

An Update on Likely ARRA Broadband Grant Proposals

Compiled by Bob Bocher, Department of Public Instruction

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There is \$7.2 billion in federal broadband funding allocated in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The following information provides an update on two likely grant proposals for the broadband funding that will be of interest to the state's public school and public library communities. These are *likely grant proposals* because, as of the date of this Update, there have been no grant application guidelines released by the federal agencies administering the broadband program.* Therefore, in relation to the two projects outlined below, neither the state Department of Administration nor the UW System can make any absolute commitment to file a grant application until the guidelines are released. While much remains unknown, it is assumed that there will be some preference for applications that demonstrate collaboration and partnerships, and some preference for applications that have a regional or statewide impact. Both of these proposed projects address these assumptions. The information below has been reviewed and approved by the applicant agencies.

For more information on the federal broadband funding, see the Department of Public Instruction's ARRA Broadband website at <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/arrabbfunding.html>. The DPI website has background information, an FAQ, and links to other related sites.

DOA BadgerNet Converged Network (BCN) Broadband Application

The state's Department of Administration (DOA) BadgerNet staff—at the recommendation of the BCN Advisory Council—had been working on a plan prior to ARRA to bring fiber to all public school districts and public libraries that are on the BCN and currently do not have fiber. The objective is to provide every library with 20Mbps, library system headquarters 100Mbps, and every school district with 100Mbps for Internet access and other educational applications. This plan has significant potential to become an ARRA Broadband Grant application.

Q1: Who is the applicant agency?

A: As it stands now, without knowing the federal grant requirements, it is likely that the state Department of Administration would be the applicant agency.

Q2: What is the primary purpose of the grant proposal?

A: To bring fiber to approximately 80 school districts and 380 public libraries that do not now have fiber in a sustainable manner and thus expand the commercial broadband infrastructure in the state.

Q3: What entities will be part of the grant proposal?

A: All school districts and public libraries on the BCN that do not now have fiber. Participation is voluntary; however, DOA will need to know very soon what public school districts or public libraries choose not to be part of the grant (see contact information below.)

* It is assumed that the first Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA), which opens the application process, will be announced in the latter half of June with a likely 60 day (late August) application deadline.

Q4: What conditions or obligations do these entities have besides any imposed by the grant guidelines?

A: Participants will likely need to make a minimal one year commitment to maintain the service. However, again depending on federal requirements, the grant may specify policies to insure grant dollars are used once committed. It is the goal for any ongoing cost to be minimal and risk free relative to keeping the service installed and utilized for the life of the grant.

Q5: Where will the 20% grant funding match come from?

A: If in-kind matching is allowed, funds might come from state sources but it is too early to make any real determination on this.

Q6: What is the current status of the project?

A: BCN staff have already obtained projected costs from the Wisconsin BadgerNet Access Alliance (WBAA) for installing the fiber in over 400 locations. BCN staff is continuing to work with the WBAA to define how sustainability may best be achieved.

Q7: Is there any other information available?

A: Much more will be known after the federal Departments of Commerce and Agriculture publish the requirements and criteria for the respective broadband grant programs.

For more information contact: Mike Meitz, Network Planning / Contract Management, Department of Administration, Division of Enterprise Technology, 608-264-9414, mike.mietz@wisconsin.gov.

UW System Broadband Application

The UW System is developing a grant proposal focused on a combination of shared public/private fiber and wireless infrastructure connecting community anchor institutions via community area networks (CANs). The anchor institutions will be the initial base from which to expand connectivity to a wider population in the public and private sectors. This proposal is based on the framework WiscNet outlined in its Go-GIG vision which is at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants/comments/7343.pdf>.

Q1: Who is the applicant agency?

A: UW-Extension/UW-Colleges. UW-Extension has a presence in every county and there is a 2 year College campus in 13 counties in the state. The UW Cooperative Extension service has as one of its principle mandates, economic development throughout the state. Furthermore, it has experienced staff with backgrounds in both grant writing and in grant management. Participants will need to have a substantial grant apparatus in place to do the necessary project monitoring and auditing. The grant solicitation will be critical in defining how much overhead, if any, can be requested to manage the grant. (Note: The law requires grant recipients to report to the federal government on the status of their project on a quarterly basis.)

Q2: What is the primary purpose of the grant proposal?

A: To stimulate the Wisconsin economy by promoting broadband access to both non-profit and profit institutions through a substantial mix of rural and medium-sized community area networks (CANs). The intent is to provide broadband access at very low cost similar to programs such as "Grow Smart" which WiscNet has adopted to lower costs. This broadband stimulus grant proposal is intended to be a highly sustainable infrastructure "scaffold" upon which other communities can build their own CANs long after the stimulus grant funding is spent.

Q3: What entities will be part of the grant proposal?

A: There will be one primary “anchor tenant” in each community. All educational entities, libraries, hospitals and health care facilities, municipal government, and other non-profits in the community area will be eligible to be part of the grant proposal. In addition, most of the fiber will be available to stimulate local economic development (research parks, business incubators, and business parks) through local businesses in partnership with network providers who may have free use of portions of the fiber build. This grant proposal will be a public-private partnership which will demonstrate how to build out community networks across the state. An example of this is the Chippewa Valley Internetworking Consortium (CINC) network in the Eau Claire area which was built with no federal funds.

Q4: What conditions or obligations do these entities have besides any imposed by the grant guidelines?

A: It is too soon to speak knowledgeably about this until the grant solicitation is announced. However, as referenced above, participants will need to have a substantial grant apparatus in place to do the local project monitoring and the required auditing. Also, another obligation is that we will utilize the UW System’s scalable 10 gigabit backbone to support the CAN initiative. The grant funds will be used to obtain fiber between the participating communities and one of the four core WiscNet nodes (Eau Claire, Green Bay, Milwaukee, Madison). It will also be possible to connect to the core backbone at a number of other locations along the route; for example, Wausau.

Q5: Where will the 20% grant funding match come from?

A: Because no grant solicitation has yet been announced it is not possible to answer this question.

Q6: What is the current status of the project?

A: We have been working with Cooperative Extension (with offices in every county), with the chancellor, David Wilson, and with the 2-year College CEOs/Deans who have expressed enthusiastic support for the CAN concept in their communities. They will meet with their community stakeholders and discuss the CAN proposal with them. We are working on a support letter for them to sign. In addition, there are seven CANs in more advanced stages of discussion with considerable information already available concerning the cost of fiber to the UW backbone. These seven areas include: Janesville/Beloit; Stevens Point/Wausau; Whitewater/Fort Atkinson/Jefferson; Racine/Kenosha; Platteville; River Falls; and La Crosse.

Q7: Is there any other information available?

A: The UW broadband proposal will be an investment of long-term benefit to not just the education and library communities but to broader sectors of the community too, including the private sector. Under this proposal we (the partner organizations or the state) will own and control access to the fiber. Ultimately we think this will help stimulate both the short-term economy and build a network infrastructure that will best position the state to compete in the 21st century.

For more information contact: Ed Meachen, Associate Vice President, Office of Learning & Information Technology, University of Wisconsin System, 608-263-2571, emeachen@uwsa.edu.

Other Possible Broadband Grant Proposal Options

There are several other likely grant proposal options. These include the following examples.

Consortium Applications: These are applications filed by an entity or organization that represents multiple grant recipients. (Both the proposed BadgerNet and UW applications are specific types of consortium applications.) Consortium applications can include a wide variety of organizations and may encompass a large geographic area. Some typical examples include:

- A municipality filing on behalf of all municipal agencies
- A CESA or library system filing on behalf of most of all of its members
- A consortium of healthcare providers filing for providers in a given geographic area

The private sector may also be involved. If you are not aware of any efforts in your region or among your peer institutions to file an application, it is important to make the necessary contacts to find out if any efforts are now underway regarding a possible application. A key issue in any consortium proposal is one of timing. Federal grant applications will likely be due in late August. If no efforts are currently underway, it can take a significant amount of time to plan and coordinate a process to get all consortium partners in agreement to file a common grant application proposal.

Single Entity Broadband Applications: These are applications that will be submitted by a single organization (e.g., a school district or library) and only include that organization. It is assumed that single applications of this type will have less chance of getting funded compared to larger, consortium applications.